



**A COMPENDIUM  
OF RIVERS**

**STEPHEN MORRISSEY**



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CORACLE  
PRESS



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"... how lovely are rivers; there isn't only one sacred river,  
all rivers throughout the world have their own divinity ..."  
—J. Krishnamurti, 1987

"No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river  
and he's not the same man."  
—Heraclitus, quoted in Plato, Cratylus, 402a

## A COMPENDIUM OF RIVERS

For the seven lakes, and by no man these verses:  
Rain; empty river; a voyage,  
Fire from frozen cloud, heavy rain in the twilight  
Under the cabin roof was one lantern.  
The reeds are heavy; bent;  
And the bamboos speak as if weeping.

—Ezra Pound, "Canto 49"

O well remembered rivers that sing of long ago,  
Ajourneying through summer or dreaming under snow.

—Bliss Carman, "Rivers of Canada"

It was late, late in the evening,  
The lovers they were gone;  
The clocks had ceased their chiming,  
And the deep river ran on.

—W.H. Auden, "As I walked Out One Evening"

Flow on, river! flow with the flood-tide, and ebb with the ebb-tide!  
Frolic on, crested and scallop-edg'd waves!  
Gorgeous clouds of the sunset! drench with your splendor me,  
or the men and women generations after me!

—Walt Whitman, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"

Sometimes I live in the country,  
sometimes I live in town  
Sometimes I take a great notion,  
to jump in the river and drown.

—Lead Belly, "Goodnight Irene"

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.

—Psalm 137:1

Charon, indeed, your dreaded oar,  
With what a peaceful sound it dips  
Into the stream; how gently, too,  
From the wet blade the water drips.

—Edna St. Vincent Millay,  
"Sappho Crosses the Dark River into Hades"

with the roar of the river  
forever in our ears (arrears)  
inducing sleep and silence the roar  
of eternal sleep . . . challenging  
our waking—

—William Carlos Williams, *Paterson*, Book One

This is not yet the sea, it is the river.

—Dudek, *Europe*, Poem 2

The company had advertised for men to unload a steamer across the  
River. It was six o'clock in the morning, snowing, and still dark.  
There was a crowd looking for work on the dock;  
and all the while men hurried to the dock.

—Charles Reznikoff, "Testimony"

Crossing the river 'where the fish play east of  
the lotus leaves' strewn with a coverlet of flowers,  
reciting our poems to a lute,  
we slept in the same bed,  
brothers in poetry.

—Nellie McClung, "Tu Fu (712-770)"

Tug against the river—  
Motor turning, lights  
In the fast water off the bow-water:  
Passes slowly.

—George Oppen, "Discrete Series 1929-1933"

the river water bathed its bed so long  
that even the light glides over the smooth wave

—Tristan Tzara, "The Approximate Man"

And the muddy waters of the Amur carrying along millions of corpses  
In every station I watched the last trains leave  
That's all: they weren't selling any more tickets  
And the soldiers would far rather have stayed. . .

—Blaise Cendrars, “The Prose of the Trans-Siberian...”

Like a strong, phallic god  
you swim naked in the river,  
in moonlight drawing your lover  
down below the surface,  
below and below and below  
the waters of consciousness.

—Carolyn Zonailo, "Like a River God"

Now you say you're lonely  
You cried the long night through  
Well, you can cry me a river, cry me a river  
I cried a river over you

—Arthur Hamilton, "Cry Me a River"

Waking at times in the night she found assurance  
In his regular breathing but wondered whether  
It was really worth it and where  
The river had flowed away  
And where were the white flowers.

—Louis MacNeice, "Les Sylphides"

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down,  
yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.

—The Bible, King James version, Psalm 137

A mighty river,  
a river of fire,  
was flowing  
under the universe

—Doukhobor *Book of Life*, # 386

Oh, rivers rolling to the sea  
From lands that bear the maple tree.

—Charles G.D. Roberts, “Canadian Streams” (1893)

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,  
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.  
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

—Elizabeth Bishop, "One Art"

Oh Shenandoah,  
I long to hear you  
Away you rolling river.  
Oh Shenandoah,  
I long to hear you,  
Away, I'm bound away,  
'Cross the wide Missouri.

—“Oh, Shenandoah”, American folksong, early 19th century

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure-dome decree:  
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns measureless to man  
Down to a sunless sea.

—Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Kubla Khan"

I'm gonna find me a river, one that's cold as ice  
And when I find me that river, Lord I'm gonna pay the price, oh Lord  
I'm goin' down in it three times, but Lord I'm only comin' up twice  
She's long gone, and now I'm lonesome blue

—Hank Williams, "Long Gone Lonesome Blues"

These are the days by the sparkling river  
His timely grace and our treasured find  
This is the love of the one great magician  
Turned the water into wine

—Van Morrison, "These are the Days"

I've a garden, a garden of dreams,  
Where the cool breeze whispering sways  
Softly the apple-sprays,  
  
And from leaves that shimmer and quiver  
Down on mine eyelids streams  
A slumber-river.

—Sappho, "My Garden"

They have watered the street,  
It shines in the glare of lamps,  
Cold, white lamps,  
And lies  
Like a slow-moving river,  
Barred with silver and black.

—Amy Lowell, "A London Thoroughfare, 2 a.m."

I get weary and so sick of tryin'  
I'm tired of livin', and afraid of dyin'  
But Old Man River, he just keeps rollin' along  
Old Man River, he just keeps rollin' along

—Oscar Hammerstein Jr. and Jerome Kern, "Old Man River"

I waited  
by the river for your pickup  
truck to find me. Footprints  
scattered in the yellow sand.  
Husband, mother-  
in-law, kids, wondering  
where I'd gone.

—Sandra Cisneros, "I am On My Way..."

Like a river flows surely to the sea  
Darling so it goes  
some things are meant to be

—Elvis Presley, "I can't stop falling in love..."

the trees sound of a river  
birds still hold  
  
while the river bends  
visible from the plane  
fuming  
continues after takeoff

almost a bird answering the dog

—Larry Eigner, "angelic youth"

Pissing in a river, watching it rise  
Tattoo fingers shy away from me  
Voices voices mesmerize  
Voices voices beckoning sea

—Patti Smith, "Pissing in a River"

this is my nostalgia  
as it appears  
in each river  
now it is night  
now my life seems to me  
a corolla  
of shadows

—Giuseppe Ungaretti, "The Rivers"

Sometimes I live in the country,  
sometimes I live in town  
Sometimes I take a great notion,  
to jump in the river and drown.

—Lead Belly, "Goodnight Irene", undated

What small or even maybe meaningful deeds  
I might have accomplished  
Somewhere  
Among strangers,  
Coming to them  
As only a river can-  
Touching every life it meets-  
That endlessly kind, that enduring.

—Mary Oliver, "River"

A slow rain sizzles  
on the river  
like a pan  
full of frying flowers,  
and with each drop  
of rain  
the ocean  
begins again.

—Richard Brautigan, "The Return of the Rivers"

Masters of civilization, you  
Who moved to riverbank from cave,  
Putting up tents, and deities,  
Though every rivulet wander through  
The final, unpolluted glades  
To cinder-bank and culvert-lip...

—Carolyn Kizer, "A Muse of Water"

Twenty bridges from Tower to Kew—  
Wanted to know what the River knew,  
Twenty Bridges or twenty-two,  
For they were young, and the Thames was old  
And this is the tale that River told...

—Rudyard Kipling, "The River's Tale"

The weight of a man on a woman  
is like falling into the river without drowning.

Above, the world is burning and fighting.  
Lost worlds flow through others.

But down here beneath water's skin,  
river floor, sand, everything

is floating, rocking.

—Linda Hogan, "Two"

If you come down to the river  
Bet you gonna find some people who live  
You don't have to worry 'cause you have [if you got] no money  
People on the river are happy to give

—John Fogerty, "Proud Mary"

We all worship  
The river in our own ways, some with stale tortillas  
From the Salvation Army, others  
With degrees in landscape architecture  
From Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.

—Lewis MacAdams, "The River: Books One, Two & Three"

The Styx is the River of Hate  
outside of Hell

but

the name

*Rio Boredom*

would fit more well.

—Michael McClure, *Fragments of Perseus*

Night climbs up to the mountain.  
Hunger goes down to the river.

Come with me.

—Pablo Neruda, "The Mountain and the River"

I've known rivers:  
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the  
flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

— Langston Hughes, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers"

I wish I had a river so long  
I would teach my feet to fly  
I wish I had a river I could skate away on

—Joni Mitchell, "River"

The river has taken the isles I loved  
The keys of silence are lost

—Anne Hébert, "A Small Despair"

What was he doing, the great god Pan,  
Down in the reeds by the river ?  
Spreading ruin and scattering ban,  
Splashing and paddling with hoofs of a goat,  
And breaking the golden lilies afloat  
With the dragon-fly on the river.

—Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "A Musical Instrument"

Moon River, wider than a mile,  
I'm crossing you in style some day.  
Oh, dream maker, you heart breaker,  
wherever you're going I'm going your way.

—Henry Mancini, Johnny Mercer, "Moon River"

I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river  
Is a strong brown god - sullen, untamed and intractable,  
Patient to some degree, at first recognised as a frontier;  
Useful, untrustworthy, as a conveyer of commerce;  
Then only a problem confronting the builder of bridges.

—T.S. Eliot, "The Dry Salvages"

O Sleepless as the river under thee,  
Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,  
Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend  
And of the curveship lend a myth to God.

—Hart Crane, "To Brooklyn Bridge"

The pale bottom won't hesitate.  
He brings what night delivers:  
the heart, flooding like a river,  
and ourselves, bird-like, wading.

—Sam Hamill, "Crossing the Great River"

Before this grief, mountains must bend down  
And rivers stop,  
But prison locks are strong,  
And behind them are the labor-camp bunks  
And the deadly tedium.

—Anna Akhmatova, "Dedication"

Jordan's river is deep and wide, hallelujah.  
Meet my mother on the other side, hallelujah.  
Jordan's river is chilly and cold, hallelujah.  
Chills the body, but not the soul, hallelujah

—Pete Seeger's version, "Michael, Row the Boat Ashore"

Oh baby there ain't no mountain high enough,  
Ain't no valley low enough,  
Ain't no river wide enough  
To keep me from getting to you babe

—Marvin Gaye, "Ain't No Mountain High Enough"

Men no longer weep  
                  by the rivers of Babylon,  
but I will speak for you.  
If I forget you, may my eyes  
lose their Jerusalem.

—Carl Rakosi, "No One Talks About This"

Now I find Japan

more and more Shinto  
a faith that makes the mountains  
and rivers their gods

—R.G. Everson, "In 1903"

Well I been to London and I been to gay Paree  
I followed the river and I got to the sea  
I've been down to the bottom of a whirlpool of lies  
I ain't lookin' for nothin' in anyone's eyes

—Bob Dylan, "Not Dark Yet"

It is one thing to sing the beloved. Another, alas,  
that obscure, guilty river-god of the blood.

—R.M. Rilke, "Third Elegy"

The river awakens.  
In the dark of the air  
only the river is heard.  
    Oh, the bitter song  
of water over rocks.

—Antonio Machado, "Highland Song"

Our lives are rivers  
flowing into the sea,  
the sea of dying.

—Jorge Manrique

I was born by the river in a little tent  
Oh, and just like the river I've been running ever since

It's been a long, a long time coming  
But I know a change gon' come, oh yes it will

—Sam Cooke, "A Change Is Gonna Come"

By the rivers dark  
I wandered on  
I lived my life  
in Babylon

—Leonard Cohen, "By the Rivers Dark"

What the river says, that is what I say.

—William Stafford, "Ask Me"



**POETRY BOOKS BY STEPHEN MORRISSEY**

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*A Private Mythology*, Ekstasis Editions, Victoria, 2014



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all rivers throughout the world have their own divinity ..."

—J. Krishnamurti, 1987

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same river and he's not the same man.

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